



Homes with Hope

*Solving homelessness in our communities through supportive housing*

**Governor's Proposed Budget FY2021-23**

**Appropriations Hearing**

**HB 6439 AAC the State Budget for the Biennium Ending June 30<sup>th</sup>, 2023**

**Department of Housing**

**Friday, February 19<sup>th</sup>, 2021**

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**Homes with Hope**

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**On Behalf of Opening Doors Fairfield**

**County and the people we serve**

Senator Osten, Representative Walker, Representative Gibson, Senator Hartley, Representative Kennedy, Senator Somers, and distinguished members of the Appropriations Committee, thank you for hearing my testimony today on House Bill 6439 (AAC the State Budget for the Biennium Ending June 30<sup>th</sup>, 2023). I am here to discuss the important investments through the Department of Housing to support efforts to end homelessness in Connecticut. My name is Helen McAlinden and I am a resident of Fairfield CT.

I am a member of the statewide Reaching Home Campaign to prevent and end homelessness in Connecticut and a Board Member of Supportive Housing works which is the backbone agency supporting the important initiatives of Opening Doors Fairfield County which I am an active member supporting this work. We, alongside many other partners in the state, know that safe, affordable, and permanent housing is the only solution to homelessness. When our state's residents have stable housing, their economic and health outcomes improve. During COVID-19, the need for permanent housing for all of Connecticut's residents has become even more important.

**I respectfully request that the committee support the following proposals from the Governor's budget for the Department of Housing (DOH).**

- We support funding for the DOH Housing and Homelessness Line Item at \$85.5 million.
  - The Governor's budget proposes cutting \$3M from this line reflecting lapses for specific programs. We request that those funds be repurposed for the Rental Assistance Program and/or homeless services.
- We are also in support funding for the DOH Homeless Youth Line Item at \$2.65M in FY 22 and \$2.94M in FY 23

**We also support the following additional investments through the DOH.**

- We support the addition of \$2.3M in specific funding for Coordinated Access Networks (CANs) to a new line item called 'Homeless Supports' at the DOH.
- Lastly, we support an additional investment of \$2M in DOH's Housing/Homeless Services Line to provide rental assistance to 200 scattered-site supportive housing units.

**Please support the above important line items to get us to the finish line.**

**On Friday, February 12, 2021, Homes with Hope had the pleasure to host Congressman Jim Himes;**



Representative Stephanie Thomas; Senator Will Haskell; First Selectman Jim Marpe - Town of Westport; and Representative Jonathan Steinberg at Homes with Hope's Gillespie Center – Homeless Emergency Shelter to thank them for his support and share with them some of the data and successes highlighted below. During the visit, some shelter guests shared their stories. I would like to share one of those stories with all of you – A shelter guest thanked Congressman Himes and the other dignitaries for their support and told first hand his struggles and shared his excitement about his potential move out of shelter, on Monday, 2/15/21 to a permanent supportive housing unit with case management supports, after many years of homelessness.

I would like to share a little about his struggles with you and celebrate as he moves to the next chapter of his life. His story is a good example of how it sometimes takes all of us a few chances in life to get to the right place and meet the goals and aspirations we set forth. His story is similar to other stories of the people we serve at our many homeless emergency shelters throughout Opening Doors Fairfield County and the other shelters throughout CT.

#### Opening Doors Fairfield County's Shelter Guest Successful Journey of Hope:

His most recent episode was on December 2020 following years of homelessness throughout many Fairfield County homeless emergency shelters, visits to jail, and struggles with substance use and bad choices which he regrets. Over the past two months, he has worked diligently with his case manager on his goals and was successfully housed in permanent supportive housing last Monday. He has ongoing goals to further improve his situation which he will continue in his new home.

He has been working with the Department of Children and Families to obtain primary custody of his children and rebuild his family life. With a joyful spark in his eyes, he reported that he's been sober for over four and a half years and is working within his online network to promote sobriety within his community.

Now having his basic needs met, everything else will fall into place. He won't have to go to the emergency room because he is cold, lonely, sick or hungry. He will have every basic need in the community that we all have, including a home, neighbors, healthcare, and as he pointed out "a bit of dignity". He will be able to reunite with his two boys and will no longer have to go from place to place.

He has goals like us all to better his life, and we were delighted to hear his plans and dreams become reality. The housing he has received is called Permanent Supportive Housing – This type of intervention has proven statistics which cut system overall costs by 70% (reduction in use of hospital emergency departments, ambulance and mobile crisis services, other publicly funded resource cuts). Proven data from our Coordinated Access Network records - 3 years after receiving Rapid Rehousing support, 93% of all households served have not returned to a shelter Permanent housing retention: 98% of those who access Permanent Housing remained in that housing over 2 years - Post lease up. I will be glad to see momentum continue in his well deserving case too.

Here are some of the impressive, (CAN), numbers that highlight positively the impact of the past funding in our community. We are getting closer to ending chronic homelessness for all. We can do it with your support; thank you so much for your continued support as we don't want to lose the momentum.

- CT saw a 4% reduction in homelessness between 2019 and 2020.
- In January 2020 in the FC region, 44 adults experienced chronic homelessness which was a 15% decrease from 2019 and a 62% reduction between 2015 and 2020
- In 2019 part of a challenge on family homelessness, providers across CT were able to help 280 families with 550 children exit homelessness into stable housing in less than 80 days.



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- CT was recognized in 2016 by the federal government as one of three states to reach functional zero on veteran homelessness. We continues to make progress on veteran homelessness – in 2020 no chronically homeless veterans were counted within the region
- FC - PIT count reductions between 2017 and 2020:
  - Total homelessness: 15%
  - Unsheltered count: 30%
  - Chronically homelessness: 16%

**Permanent Supportive Housing:** housing and services can cut system overall costs by 70% (reduction in use of hospital emergency departments, ambulance and mobile crisis services, other publicly funded resource cuts)

3 years after receiving RRH support, 93% of all households served have not returned to a shelter  
Permanent housing retention: 98% of those who access PH remained in that housing 2 yrs. Post lease up.

Since 2012, the number of people utilizing Connecticut's shelter system has decreased by 57%. Investing in proven solutions to homelessness is necessary in continuing our progress and ensuring that every youth, family, and individual has a safe, stable place to call home.

Thank you to the committee for the opportunity to present this testimony and sharing one of many stories of people served by Opening Doors Fairfield County throughout Connecticut. All of us appreciate your hard work making important and life-saving decisions during this public health crisis – it is with your support that we can help make sure Connecticut's most vulnerable residents are healthy and stably housed.

Together, we can end homelessness!

Feel free to reach out to me if you have further questions.

Sincerely,

Helen McAlinden  
President and CEO  
Home with Hope on behalf of Opening Doors Fairfield County